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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, December 27, 2006

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Man flees after mall bathroom incident

Wednesday, December 27, 2006

BY AMALIE NASH

News Staff Reporter

A man accused of trying to enter bathroom stalls occupied by two girls Tuesday evening at Briarwood Mall was later struck by a car driven by the girls' father before the suspect escaped by scaling a fence and running across a freeway, police said.

The bizarre incident unfolded at the mall when the girls, sisters ages 8 and 11 of Ypsilanti Township, were using the restroom, police said. They said a man entered the restroom and peered at them through the stall doors, then attempted to get inside the stalls with them, police said. The girls kicked the doors and pressed their bodies against the stalls to keep him out. "It was very scary for those girls," Detective Sgt. Jeff Connelly said.

The girls alerted their father and pointed out the man as he crouched in a nearby hallway. When the father tried to confront him, the stranger ran and led the father and other mall patrons on a chase that ended when he disappeared outside, police said.

Later in the evening, the father and girls were leaving the mall when the girls saw the same man in the parking lot - apparently returning to get his vehicle, police said. The father drove toward the man and tried to block him in, striking him twice and sending him onto the hood of the car, reports said.

With the father, security guards and witnesses chasing him, the man scaled a fence and ran across I-94.

Police said they have a potential suspect based on the vehicles left in the mall parking lot overnight. They have not yet been able to contact the registered owner of one vehicle, a 41-year-old Dearborn Heights man who matches the description of the man in the bathroom, police said.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6832.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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December 27, 2006

Man faces new assault allegations

Two more families report incidents following accusations that Sterling Heights senior molested two children.

Steve Pardo / The Detroit News

STERLING HEIGHTS -- A Sterling Heights man accused of molesting two children could face new charges after two more families came forward with similar allegations, police say.

Donald Fitzpatrick, 61, was arrested late last month following an investigation by Sterling Heights police and the Oakland County Sheriff's Office.

He is accused of sexually assaulting a 7-year-old girl and faces a charge of second-degree criminal sexual conduct in Oakland County involving a 9-year-old girl at her family's home in the Rochester Hills area. The girls are related, authorities said. Police believe there could be even more victims.

"There have been at least two more families come forward regarding their children being assaulted by this guy," said Sterling Heights Lt. Michael Reese.

Police said the assault of the 7-year-old occurred at his Tacoma Street home, and that she is the granddaughter of a friend of Fitzpatrick.

In that case, first-degree criminal sexual conduct involves sexual contact of a person under the age of 13. He could be sentenced from 25 years to life in prison if convicted. He also faces a separate, lesser charge of second-degree criminal sexual conduct involving the 9-year-old girl.

He is being held without bond in the Macomb County Jail. An arraignment is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Jan. 2 in Macomb Circuit Court. Sterling Heights Detective John Jacob said Fitzpatrick would baby-sit children at his Tacoma home.

You can reach Steve Pardo at (586) 468-3614 or spardo@detnews.com.

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Lansing State Journal
Letters to the Editor
Dec. 26, 2006

Let Ricky rest

I continue to be dismayed at the LSJ's insistence to assault me as often as possible with the photographs of the undeservedly notorious Holland pair. Equally as dismaying is the unabashed exploitation of the poor, abused Ricky and the lone photo the paper seemingly has. This horrific barrage has occurred for well over a year and I wonder when can I, as a daily reader, expect to be free from this oppression? As a community, we should ponder the prevalence of children being abused and murdered by their supposed caretaker. These stories must have a voice. But how is the purpose of saving children served through the constant display of these already infamous individuals on the front page? How can the relentless use of that one little photo of Ricky prevent other children from suffering his fate? When will the LSJ let Ricky rest?

Gina Garner
Lansing

Detroit News

Dec. 25, 2006

Wayne County Briefs

Canton Township

Arraignment set in death of foster child

Carol A. Poole, 40, will be arraigned at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday at the 3rd Circuit Court on charges of felony murder, first-degree child abuse and manslaughter in the death of her foster daughter, Allison Newman. Allison, 2, died of head trauma on Sept. 22.

Authorities say Poole gave four different accounts of how Allison had injured herself, including that the toddler slept roughly, hit her head in her bed and fell from a 12-foot balcony during a game of whirlybird.

Parents Guilty Of Child Abuse; Jury Hears Ohio Couple Put Adopted Youngsters Into Cages

Date: Saturday, December 23, 2006

Source: *Associated Press*

A couple accused of forcing some of their 11 adopted special-needs children to sleep in wood and wire cages were convicted Friday of endangerment and abuse.

Sharen Gravelle and her husband, Michael, showed no reaction in the courtroom as the guilty verdicts were read. The jury convicted both of four felony counts of child endangering and seven misdemeanor counts. Each was acquitted of 13 charges, including four felony child endangering charges.

The parents claimed during the three-week trial that they needed to keep some of the youngsters in enclosed beds rigged with alarms to protect them from their own dangerous behavior and stop them from wandering at night. Their attorneys said an appeal is likely.

"I feel terrible," said Ken Myers, the lawyer for Sharen Gravelle, 58.

"We don't think they were guilty of any criminal offenses. They did the best they could with a very difficult situation and with very little help." Prosecutor Daivia Kasper said she was satisfied with the verdicts. "I had certainly hoped for felonies on behalf of all the children," she said.

The children, who suffered from problems such as fetal alcohol syndrome and a disorder that involves eating nonfood items, ranged in age from 1 to 14 when authorities removed them in September 2005 from the Gravelle home in rural Wakeman, about 60 miles west of Cleveland. The youngsters were placed in foster care last fall, and the couple lost custody in March.

Margaret Kern, a court-appointed advocate for the children, was delighted with the outcome. "Finally, it was a long time coming, but justice has been served for these children," she said.

The youngsters are doing well in foster homes, she said.

Jurors declined to comment.

The Gravelles could face one to five years in prison and a maximum fine of \$10,000 for each felony count. The misdemeanors can result in no jail time to up to six months each. Judge Earl McGimpsey set sentencing for Feb. 12 and allowed the Gravelles to remain free on bail.

Kirk sentenced to four months in federal prison

Ex-school program head concealed past sex crimes

By CRAIG McCOOL

mccoolrecordeagle@sbcglobal.net

CHARLEVOIX — The former head of a school mentoring program will serve time in prison for concealing past sex crimes that made him ineligible to work with children.

Arthur Kirk, who ran the federal AmeriCorps program for the Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District, was sentenced to four months in federal prison and ordered to repay more than \$25,000 for lying on his AmeriCorps program application.



U.S. District Judge Richard Enslen this month ordered Kirk, 72, to serve four months in prison, to be followed by three years of supervised release.

Kirk was born Arthur Kirkeby but changed his name following three Macomb County sex crime convictions in the late 1970s and early '80s, a fact he did not reveal and a state police background check did not uncover when he applied to the ISD as an AmeriCorps volunteer in 2001.

He subsequently was made the program's director and earned a government stipend. His arrest in 2005 sparked new laws mandating more stringent background checks for people who work in schools.

Kirk's lawyers argued at the Dec. 14 sentence hearing that the harm caused was "mostly reputational" and said no restitution should be ordered.

"AmeriCorp needed people to do this work. Arthur did it," public defender David Kaczor wrote in a pre-sentence brief. "AmeriCorp was going to pay someone to do these jobs, anyway."

That Kirk apparently adequately performed his AmeriCorps duties is "irrelevant," countered federal prosecutor Thomas Gezon.

"The large factor that Kirk ignores is that neither the school, nor the federal agency wanted a three-time convicted child molester to apply ... in a grant program which works with school children," Gezon wrote in a brief.

Enslin ordered Kirk to pay \$26,591 in restitution and allowed Kirk to turn himself in to federal officials.

Kaczor said short federal prison terms are sometimes served in local jails.

Adrian Daily Telegram
Friday, Dec. 22, 2006

Abuse appeal fails

ADRIAN — The Michigan Court of Appeals upheld an Onsted woman's jury conviction for third-degree child abuse, according to a ruling received Thursday by the Lenawee County prosecutor's office.

Bobbi Jo Bacon, 28, claimed her attorney failed to call a key witness to testify at her Lenawee County Circuit Court trial in September 2005. Bacon was accused of throwing her boyfriend's 3-year-old son against a wall and spanking him so hard that bruises in the shape of handprints were left on his buttocks.

In the appeal, she claimed that a former boyfriend of the boy's mother should have been called as a witness to support her defense that it was the mother who bruised the victim. A three-judge Appeals Court panel disagreed, finding no evidence that Bacon's attorney did not have good reason to not call the ex-boyfriend as a witness.

"There is only speculation in the record that the boyfriend would even testify consistently with defendant's theory of the case," the panel stated in its ruling.

Bacon was sentenced in October 2005 to a nine-month jail term with seven months deferred to the end of a five-year probation period.

County ruled not liable in child's death; Marcus Fiesel's mother filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against his foster parents, placement agency.

Date: Friday, December 22, 2006

Source: *Dayton Daily News (Ohio)*

Author: *Dave Greber*

HAMILTON - A Butler County judge ruled Thursday that Marcus Fiesel's mother and attorney did not make its case that the county and its children services board were liable for the 3-year-old Middletown boy's death while in foster care.

Common Pleas Judge Michael Sage on Thursday dismissed the county and agency from a \$5 million wrongful death lawsuit filed Sept. 5 on behalf of Marcus' mother, Donna Trevino.

The lawsuit sought damages from foster parents Liz and David Carroll Jr., the couple's live-in girlfriend Amy Baker, Lifeway for Youth, the private agency that placed Marcus with the Carrolls in May, Butler County and the Butler County Children Services Board.

Sage said Trevino and her attorney Kevin Hughes were unable to provide enough evidence to make the county liable for any wrongdoing.

Hughes could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Prosecutors say the Carrolls locked Marcus in a closet of their Union Twp. home - wrapped in a blanket and bound by packing tape - for two days in early August while they attended a family reunion in Kentucky.

When they returned, prosecutors say David Carroll Jr. took the body and burned it in Brown County.

Murder trials for the Carrolls are scheduled for early next year in Clermont County.

The lawsuit still seeks damages from the Carrolls, Baker and Lifeway for Youth.

Officials close adult foster care home

FROM STAFF REPORTS

GAYLORD — State authorities shut down an adult foster care home in Otsego County and officials said they intend to revoke the facility's license to operate.

The Michigan Department of Human Services, Office of Children and Adult Licensing, suspended the license of adult foster care home provider Phyllis Roberts this month. She operated Robert's Gentle Care on Hayes Tower Road near Gaylord. It was licensed to house six adults.

A complaint was filed with state officials about the facility and a subsequent investigation found violations regarding licensee suitability, restricting the movement of a resident by binding or tying, resident nutrition and rules on the altering, administration and storage of resident medication.

Roberts could not be reached for comment. She has held a license to operate an adult foster care family home since October 1999.

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Article published Dec 26, 2006

EDITORIAL

Cap on welfare benefits is reasonable measure

In recent years, Michigan has been among only a few states that provided open-ended welfare assistance. That is scheduled to change next October when recently approved legislation takes effect, limiting welfare recipients to a lifetime total of four years of cash assistance.

Not to sound Scrooge-like on the day after Christmas, but we think it is perfectly reasonable to place a cap - with several compassionate and common-sense exceptions - on how long able-bodied people can expect the government to support them.

Considering many states have adopted two-year limits, Michigan's cap seems almost generous. It's also important to note that in states that have adopted limits, critics' predictions of mass numbers of people being kicked off welfare and left in desperation have not materialized.

The focus of Michigan's Social Welfare Act is on helping people get on their feet so that they can be self-sustaining. That is how it should be. The state doesn't just dole out cash. Recipients develop a family self-sufficiency plan and then can opt for work, job training or education to help realize that plan.

The 48-month lifetime limit on cash assistance only applies to recipients who live in a county where a Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program is available, with a 12-month extension of benefits available under certain circumstances.

The limit also does not apply to individuals with low intellectual capacity, chronic and untreatable mental health problems or physical limitations combined with low intellectual capacity.

So truly needy, helpless people will not be kicked to the curb under the measure.

But the new rules do establish penalties for those who do not comply with their self-sufficiency plans, such as failing to attend training sessions or classes. In other words, if you are able, then you are obligated to try to stand on your own two feet, with the state willing to provide necessary assistance.

Family self-sufficiency plans are required by the Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant regulations and require those receiving cash assistance to participate in work or work/education/training activities in order to get aid.

Being self-sufficient not only provides a sense of pride and accomplishment, it is a necessary component of a functional society. While government should assist those who are downtrodden and truly disabled, it cannot afford to provide unending support for those who simply prefer not to support themselves.



Children's statistics, adults' burden

Saturday, December 23, 2006

There has to be a statewide sense of urgency about improving the well-being of children. An annual report on their quality of life says that more of them live in poverty, on food stamps and are victims of maltreatment. Lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer Granholm must be committed to working together next year to generate the jobs that can remedy much of what ails families. The abuse and neglect figures deserve study, especially on questions of Department of Human Services staffing and oversight. And unquestionably there is a need to protect services that help with parenting.

The challenges loom large in the Kids Count report, produced by two private advocacy groups, the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children. The report reviews indicators of child well-being in health, economic security adolescence and child safety for the 83 counties and the city of Detroit.

There are significant bright spots. Progress was made in seven of the 14 indicators tracked. The teen birth rate dropped by 28 percent between 1997 and 2004, from 48 to 34 births per 1,000, for ages 15 to 19. The teen death rate fell, for the same age range, by about one-quarter, from 80 deaths per 100,000 to 61. Those gains and others mustn't be overlooked.

The need to improve the economic security of families is at the root of most of the key negative findings.

- Nearly two of every five children lived in families with incomes below or marginally above the federal poverty level in 2005.
- Children involved in the Food Assistance Program (food stamps) almost doubled between 2000 and 2005, jumping from 10 percent to 19 percent of children.
- One of three children depended on Medicaid for access to health care in 2005.
- Approximately 28,000 children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in 2005, compared to almost 21,000 in 1997.

In Ottawa County the percentage of children receiving food stamps nearly quadrupled, from 2.2 percent in 2000 to 8.5 percent of the population or 68,449. In Kent County, those receiving food stamps more than doubled from 7.7 percent to 17.7 percent or about 164,680.

The rise in confirmed abuse and neglect cases statewide warrants further scrutiny. In some cases neglect can stem from parents' lack of funds to provide basic needs like adequate food for their children or just poor parenting skills. DHS staffing is always an issue. Even though 50 additional child protection service workers were approved earlier this year, more may be necessary.

The Kids Count statistics are sobering and should serve as additional motivation for lawmakers and Ms. Granholm to seek common ground on ways to restore the Michigan economy. But the state, or even government overall, cannot address all of the problems afflicting children. Clearly, there is work to do at the community level. Churches, private and public social service agencies and others have to continue to be parts of the solution to making kids count, a lot and all the time.

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13-year-old pleads not guilty

Friday, December 22, 2006

DARRYL Q. TUCKER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

The shackled, pint-sized teen sat silently as his attorney entered a not guilty plea for him in the stabbing death of a Saginaw man.

In front of his mother and other family members, the 13-year-old Saginaw youth wearing an oversized blue sweatshirt waived his preliminary hearing Thursday in Saginaw County Probate Court and will proceed to trial on a charge of manslaughter in the slaying of Domingo S. Cirilo Jr., 47.

Court officials set a Thursday, Feb. 1, trial date. Prosecutors are trying the teen as a juvenile.

Probate Referee Matthew A. Dambro denied bond for the teen during a hearing that lasted about two minutes, citing the seriousness of the offense and that he is facing his second offense in less than six months. Prosecutors charged the teen with illegally entering a building.

The teen's attorney, James E. Tiderington, said his client stands 4 feet 10 inches tall and weighs 90 pounds.

Police said witnesses told them the teen, who was an acquaintance of Cirilo's, stabbed the Saginaw bricklayer to death Dec. 15 during an argument over a dog. The substance of the argument is unclear, but it ended when the teen grabbed a knife from Cirilo's kitchen and stabbed him in the chest and face inside Cirilo's house on South Wheeler near Green, investigators said. v

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COLUMN: Why Doesn't White Adopt Black?

Date: Sunday, December 24, 2006

Source: *The Washington Post*

Author: *David Nicholson*

Whenever I see a white couple with an Asian or Hispanic child, I can't help wondering whether adoption -- like the personal ads -- is one of the last areas of American life where naked expressions of racial preference are acceptable.

I know that sentiment seems ungenerous. Most of the children I see would have grown up in dire circumstances if they hadn't been adopted, and many will find me mean-spirited for gainsaying any child a chance at a happy and successful life.

All the same, I can't understand why so many white American couples go overseas to adopt, ignoring the plight of black children in the United States, such as the hundreds in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia awaiting adoption.

One person at a state agency I talked to said one word -- "Madonna" -- when I asked why more people don't adopt black children in the United States.

The well-publicized examples of Madonna and Angelina Jolie to the contrary, however, fewer children are adopted from African countries than, say, from China or Russia. Of the 27,000 children Americans adopted from overseas in fiscal 2005, only 441 came from Ethiopia, the African country with the largest number of international adoptions. Nearly 8,000 came from Russia and more than 4,500 from China, according to the National Council for Adoption.

I know, of course, that it can be difficult to adopt through local agencies. My wife and I had been licensed foster parents for nearly four years, but we still had to start at the beginning when we applied to adopt through the District's Child and Family Services agency. It's been a year. We're still waiting.

Then, too, many couples want newborns or infants, the children most in demand. Older children are often part of sibling groups that can't be broken up, or they have physical or emotional problems that can try the most committed parents.

And even if prospective parents can deal with these issues, birth parents can decide at the last minute not to terminate their parental rights, meaning adoptive parents can't be certain they'll get the child they want to include in their families.

Still, I can't help thinking there's something else going on when whites go overseas, and I suspect that something is race. Why else would the Latin American doctor displaying a newborn in the video that a friend described to me assure the prospective American parents that the child was "very white"?

As with most matters concerning race, it's hard to get people to talk about these things. But when I've discussed transracial adoption with white acquaintances, their explanations reveal the persistence of the racial chasm.

One woman who adopted a Chinese infant told me she and her husband had "thought about adopting a black boy, but we weren't sure if we could deal with it when he became a teenager."

Then there was the woman who told me how much she admired my wife and me for taking in my 14-year-old godson. As for herself, she said, "I'd rather pay later for the criminal justice and social work systems than pay personally now."

I didn't know how to respond. What can you say to people who think the truculent misbehavior of rap "heroes" such as 50 Cent or Snoop Dogg is part of a child's genetic inheritance, like the shape of his nose or his skin color?

Another acquaintance said in an e-mail conversation that he didn't think it "necessarily racist for a pair of white adoptive parents to say to themselves, 'It's hard enough just raising a kid, I don't feel prepared to take on at the same time, in my own kitchen, American original sin and the tangled issue of racial identity.' . . . I don't think you can expect most, or even many, to show that level of personal commitment."

I understand what he meant. It is hard, of course, raising any child. And black children might pose a special problem for white families, especially with attitudes from quarters such as the National Association of Black Social Workers, which, despite federal law barring consideration of race in adoption, still thinks black adoptees should go only to black families.

All the same, I can't help wondering how much racism -- in the form of an inability to see blacks as human in the same way they see themselves -- is at the heart of white couples' decision to adopt overseas.

It may not be the dictionary definition of racism, but it's one more piece of evidence of how, years after the civil rights movement, blacks and whites have failed to engage on that deeply human level that would allow more whites to say, "Yes, I'll take this child into my kitchen. And my heart."

David Nicholson is a Washington writer. His e-mail address is dnicholson6@excite.com.



Shelter survey shows black people's plight

Tuesday, December 26, 2006

By Ted Roelofs

The Grand Rapids Press

In the past few years, David Brown has had jobs, lost jobs, had a nice place to stay and lived on the streets.

He also has grown accustomed to seeing plenty of other black people facing the same hard life.

"I see it. I see it on the street. You can see it walking downtown Division street," said Brown, 43, who resides for now at the Guiding Light Mission in Grand Rapids.

The findings of a recent mission survey come as no surprise to Brown: The proportion of homeless black people far exceeds their share of the general population.

At Guiding Light, a survey taken Oct. 13 found 58 percent of those seeking shelter were black, compared to 40 white and 2 percent Hispanic. Grand Rapids' black population was just over 20 percent in the 2000 census.

The numbers from other West Michigan shelters that participated in the survey confirm the disparity. At Mel Trotter Ministries in Grand Rapids, 33 percent were black. At the Holland Rescue Mission, 27 percent were black -- while Ottawa County's overall black population is about 1 percent.

The survey of missions is collected annually by the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions in Kansas City.

Betty Zylstra, director of the Salvation Army's Booth Family Services, said the findings reflect not only the broader causes of homelessness but the way they land on the minority community.

"It's not terribly surprising to me, but it is not any less troubling," Zylstra said. "Homelessness is about poverty, and poverty is about marginalization. People in poverty are disproportionately people of color.

"That is a great concern."

And for many who live in poverty, Zylstra said, they may be a job layoff or a broken car away from living on the streets.

"It's usually people who are a paycheck away. They get a utility bill they can't afford or they fall behind on their rent," she said.

According to the U.S. Census, poverty in Grand Rapids jumped from 15.7 percent in 1999 to 20.8 percent in 2005. Those percentages are even higher in portions of the city that are heavily black.

Those numbers, in turn, are tied to factors such as the disappearance of West Michigan manufacturing jobs in recent years and high dropout rates among minority students. A recent audit of the Grand Rapids Public Schools found 31 percent drop out before finishing high school.

"I think a significant portion of the black population has been left behind because of shifts in our economy," said the Rev. Chico Daniels, executive director of the Guiding Light Mission.

"There is an entire group caught in that transition, and they have not been able to upgrade their skill set."

For men like Merlyn Nailon, 42, the road to self-sufficiency can be long

and bumpy.

After bouts with cocaine addiction and attempts at treatment in Indiana, Nailon got a one-way bus ticket to Grand Rapids and the treatment program at Guiding Light Mission. By 2004, he had a production job at a local manufacturer and his wife, Felicia, moved back in with him.

He worked his way up to a sales position, got another promotion, then was laid off in September as part of a broad layoff in his department. Nailon backed out of the mortgage on a home he had just signed and was forced into emergency housing for nearly a month.

He got a job as head of security at Guiding Light and is now renting a two-bedroom apartment in Grand Rapids with his wife.

Nailon feels confident about his future, but believes that many black men are afraid to take the steps toward self-sufficiency and a constructive life.

"Our history is riddled with fear. We live there. It's difficult to explain, but it's certainly there. I think, in some ways, our greatest fear is success because we have never experienced it."

Standing outside the mission in the rain, Dan Raney, 40, had a simple explanation for the disproportionate share of homelessness among blacks.

"There just ain't no jobs working for us right now. That's what we need -- jobs."

Raney said he worked for a time at a local McDonald's restaurant but couldn't afford an apartment on the money he made. For a time, he lived in the mission.

Three months ago, he was laid off from his factory job.

As he looks for work, he now has a place in a subsidized apartment through Dwelling Place Inc.

"I guess you got to go with the punches," he said.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Facing homelessness Unemployed man struggles to find work and assistance

Sunday, December 24, 2006

By John Liberty

jl liberty@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8579

Stephen Basly is staring down two cold realities: He's very close to being homeless and there's not much he or anyone else can do to prevent it.

Five years ago, the then-46-year-old computer programmer was making more than \$55,000 a year working for the Minneapolis-based health-insurance-administration company Health Risk Management Inc. Today, he is unemployed and more than four months behind on rent. His life savings are gone and his credit is in shambles.

Basly said he's not out on the street yet because of a sympathetic landlord, but time is running out. He has received some help from local agencies, but not enough to keep a roof over his head.

"I paid taxes for 30 years and now I'm holding out my hand for help and I can't get it," said Basly, who grew up in the Benton Harbor area and moved to Kalamazoo in 2000.

While state, county and city officials try to provide shelter for those who are already homeless, able-bodied individuals like Basly generally can't receive cash assistance until they've lost almost everything and joined the homeless population.

According to the philosophy of former Gov. John Engler's 1992 welfare reform, individuals like Basly should be or are better able to find work to support themselves, said Karen Stock, spokesperson for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

"But that's not always as easy as it sounds," Stock said. "Bottom line, it is more difficult for a single, able-bodied individual to get (cash) assistance because that is now focused on children and families."

On Wednesday, Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed a bill that will limit welfare recipients to four years of cash assistance beginning in October.

Basly's case illustrates how hard it is for a single male to get assistance through state, county and local agencies.

It also highlights a debate each community must consider when addressing the problem of homelessness: Where is the money best spent?

On Monday, the Kalamazoo City Commission released \$250,000 that it earmarked in 2004 to establish a publicly funded, affordable-housing trust that would pay for a housing-voucher program and potentially a bricks-and-mortar development to provide housing for the homeless.

The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners also has appropriated \$250,000 for the trust.

David Anderson, chairman of the Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission and a Kalamazoo city commissioner, said \$125,000 of that money and an additional \$500,000 from the Michigan Housing Development Authority will go toward helping the "chronically homeless," defined as single, unaccompanied individuals with a disabling condition who have either been homeless for a year or have had four episodes of homelessness in the last three years.

That's not Basly.

The remaining \$375,000 will be used to develop a program aiming to have existing shelters and social-services agencies more effectively address the issues of the homeless and of low-income families and individuals, which could include Basly.

The question Anderson and others are asking is: How can the money best be spent? How much should be spent helping the chronically homeless and how much should be spent to aid those facing homelessness?

``That's a discussion for the town square, I guess: How do we want to spend our resources?" Anderson said.

`Watching every penny'

Basly, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in marketing from Michigan State University in 1977 and has a two-year degree in data processing from Lake Michigan College in 1984, moved to Kalamazoo after he struggled to find work in Benton Harbor. Basly, who had then been recently divorced, was hired by Health Risk Management, where he wrote computer programs and applications.

``I honestly thought I'd be able to retire from there," he said.

But in August 2001, Health Risk Management filed for bankruptcy. Shortly after that, and a year-and-a-half after Basly was hired, he was ``pink-slipped."

He started doing some consulting and Web-site design work, but that dried up. He tried a series of art projects, like designing custom-made clocks to pay the bills, which he still does, but income from that work has been inconsistent.

In 2004, he got a job at a store working part-time. He suffered a collapsed left lung, which required surgery. Insurance through the retailer did not cover the cost, but he retained his job. He returned to work after surgery but was fired in June for violating a company policy. On several occasions, Basly acknowledged, he purchased items from the store by ringing himself up. The retailer confirmed that such an offense would result in termination.

Basly said he never stole anything and accepts responsibility for not following the policy. But, as a result of the firing, he is not eligible to collect unemployment. And he says the firing has hurt him in job interviews.

Two weeks ago, he interviewed for a computer-programming job in Grand Rapids. The morning of his interview, his neighbor Karen Stuart came over to cut his hair because he didn't have the money to pay for a trim.

Stuart and her boyfriend also lent Basly their car to drive to Grand Rapids. Basly said he didn't have enough confidence in his 1990 Ford pickup truck, which has more than 250,000 miles on it, to make the trek.

He also borrowed \$50 from his church, the 12th Street Baptist Church, to pay for gas.

``I'm watching every penny," he said as he got his hair cut. ``If this job doesn't come through, I don't know what I'm going to do. I'll be homeless."

On Dec. 15, Basly was told he wouldn't get the job. The company said it wanted someone with more experience in using its software program.

Facing eviction

His landlord, Fe James, whom he met through his church, gave him a typed letter in November stating he must pay the amount he owes in rent by Dec. 20 or he would be out, although it was not an official eviction notice.

The small house Basly is renting was the first house James' parents owned when they moved here from the Philippines in the 1980s. Her parents died in 2003 and she spent the last few years fixing it up to rent it out. Basly is the first renter, she said.

James said Basly's rent money was supposed to be used to pay taxes on the home. She said she has until Feb. 14 to make the payments or the bank will foreclose on the house.

But James is feeling sympathy for Basly during the holiday season.

“It's Christmas. I don't want him to be homeless,” she said.

According to the law, to evict a tenant, a landlord must fill out an official form called a demand for nonpayment of rent. The tenant has seven days to comply. If the tenant does not pay up within seven days, the landlord must file the necessary forms with the local court and a hearing date will be set, usually within 10 days. The tenant then has another 10 days to comply or the sheriff's department will remove the tenant from the property.

Falling through the cracks

James' letter was not an official eviction notice, so Basly may have some additional time before he loses his home. But because he hasn't received an official eviction notice and doesn't have an income, he doesn't qualify for cash welfare assistance from the Kalamazoo County Human Services Department, which currently provides Basly with about \$150 in food stamps monthly and has helped pay his back utility bills.

To get rental help from the local nonprofit organization Housing Resources Inc., he must first be rejected by Human Services, which he has been. But he must show proof of income, which he does not have.

HRI public-relations and event specialist Karen Kacynski said the agency would like to help everyone it can, but families, not individuals, are HRI's priority.

“We focus mainly on families because that is the largest population of homeless folks,” Kacynski said. “We (social-service organizations) each have our specialties so we don't overlap services.”

If HRI cannot help someone, the agency recommends that the person seek help from the county Human Services Department or the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, which offers assistance to the homeless. But Basly is not homeless, yet.

“There are folks who fall through the cracks, unfortunately,” Kacynski said.

Basly is stuck in one of those cracks.

In addition to seeking help from HRI and Human Services, he also regularly attends meetings held by Michigan Works, a state-funded agency offering employment and training programs. Michigan Works and other agencies have set up interviews for Basly, but he said he's been turned down because he's “overqualified.” Employers don't want to hire someone who will leave when a better offer comes around, Basly said.

Initially, he looked for work similar to what he had five years ago. Now he's not as picky. He estimates he has turned in more than 100 resumes in the past five months, including at area McDonald's restaurants, hardware stores and bookstores.

“As more time went by, the type of position I was looking for and willing to accept, my standards came down,” he said. “For the last couple months, I've been looking at anything.”

All Basly wants, he said, is to be able to pay the rent.

He said he's received some job interest from outside the state, but he can't afford to travel far. Other employers want him to have more experience with their computer programs, but he's too broke to pay for more training.

Basly said he looks back at his life five years ago and appreciates how fortunate he was then. He said he doesn't want handouts and that he'll pay back whatever he's given, when he can. He said he's thankful for the help agencies have given him, but he's also frustrated by the system.

“If I ever get on my feet again, I'm giving to as many agencies as I can,” he said. “Now I've been on the other end -- with nothing.”

A gift of health insurance

Program covers those in need

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT

FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER

December 25, 2006

Unemployed and uninsured, Richard Dixon spent nearly three years worrying each time one of his two sons sniffled or coughed.

He took them to the nearest emergency department when they got sick. His own heart and blood pressure drugs cost him \$7,000 a year, he figures.

Last year, the director of a private Detroit Medicaid eligibility company reviewed Dixon's finances for a third Medicaid application and figured out that Dixon, 45, and his sons qualified.

"It sure has been a big difference," said Dixon, a onetime tow truck driver who hasn't worked after having two strokes, the first at 26, and a heart attack 2 1/2 years ago.

Advocates say lots of people are in the same position. So in a new campaign, the United Way and the Detroit Wayne County Health Authority aim to alert Michigan's 1 million uninsured people that there might be a way for them to get health insurance coverage.

Families should call United Way's 211 social service hotline to get help. For a family of four, the income cutoff for Medicaid is about \$40,000, according to the health authority.

Children particularly are likely to qualify for Medicaid. About 70% of the 160,000 children in Michigan who are uninsured -- about 56,000 in Detroit and Wayne County -- are eligible for state programs, according to the health authority. The number of uninsured families is rising with layoffs and corporate cuts in employee benefits.

State Medicaid caseworkers are stretched so thin, after budget cuts have thinned their ranks, that the department "is overwhelmed," said Tom Duncan, who heads Care Compensation Specialists, a company that claims a 30-day turnaround time and 93% acceptance rate for Medicaid.

Sometimes, gaining eligibility is a matter of getting all the paperwork and documentation together in a package, said Duncan, whose company does the work with a grant from Wayne County.

Recently, he helped Joseph Easley, 55, and his wife, Joyce, 56, who has lung cancer, escape \$81,000 worth of hospital bills by getting them qualified in a record 22 days, Duncan said.

"Generally it takes upwards of 180 days to get disability cases approved," said Duncan, who also helps people qualify for two types of Social Security programs that provide health insurance.

His firm uses outreach workers who travel if needed to get information for applicants.

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2006612250342&template=printart>



Richard Dixon, 45, and sons Sidney Dixon, 11, left, and Steven Alexander, 13, all of Detroit, qualified for the free health insurance from Medicaid after three years of going without coverage. A new campaign aims to alert people to the program. (MANDI WRIGHT/Detroit Free Press)

How to get help

A program in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties links callers to programs offering free and low-cost health care. Here are some ways to apply:

By phone

- Call United Way hotlines: 211 or 800-552-1183.

- Call Care Compensation Specialists, a private firm specializing in Medicaid eligibility, at 313-962-0692.

By Internet

A gift of health insurance

Recently, they signed up a pregnant woman for Medicaid insurance who was staying at a suburban domestic violence shelter, he said.

Easley spent weeks trying to get help. A hospital caseworker "gave me a list of people to call and I called just about everyone on the list," said Easley, who has congestive heart failure.

Duncan took over and got them insurance. He found the couple physicians who accept Medicaid patients.

"I'm no longer a nervous wreck," Easley said.

Contact **PATRICIA ANSTETT** at 313-222-5021 or panstett@freepress.com.

- Search for MIChild programs for children at www.michigan.gov.

- Visit the Detroit Wayne County Health Authority Web site at www.dwcha.org. It also contains a list of free clinics in metro Detroit.

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December 25, 2006

Mumps finds its way back to Michigan

Health experts suspect resurgence is linked to larger outbreaks in Iowa, elsewhere in Midwest.

Mark Hicks / The Detroit News

Think mumps is a bygone illness?

Think again. According to state and national health studies, mumps has made a major reappearance this year in Michigan and throughout the Midwest.

"Our numbers are much higher," said T.J. Bucholz, spokesman for the state Department of Community Health. "We are telling people that mumps has become more prevalent, and to check their immunization status."

Since January, 86 cases have been reported to the state health department -- a 258 percent increase over 2005, when 24 cases were tallied. Only two instances were reported in Michigan in 2004.

That's why Mona Fawaz, 36, a student and single mother from Dearborn, has taken action. She's verified that her son, Ali, 11, and daughter, Shalimar, 9, are up to date on their immunizations.

While the youngsters were "not happy" about the needle prick, Fawaz says she was relieved they were "a little sore ... but fine" following the vaccinations.

Marked by swelling of the salivary glands, mumps is a viral infection that can be spread via exposure to saliva from coughing and sneezing or through close contact such as kissing and sharing drinking glasses.

The virus, which cannot infect a person more than once, is most contagious two days before and four days after its onset.

Health experts believe the spike peaked in late spring and is possibly linked to larger outbreaks in Iowa, where about 2,000 cases were recorded, and other Midwestern regions.

By October, 3,113 confirmed cases were reported nationwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Only 258 cases were confirmed in the United States in 2004.

Since the 1992-93 school year, Michigan officials have required students to receive two doses of the measles, mumps and rubella, or MMR, vaccine.

Although that requirement has helped keep the disease "fairly in check," Bucholz said it has re-emerged in pockets across the state, varying across age groups.

Despite the rise statewide, fewer mumps cases have been reported in Metro Detroit.

The Wayne County Department of Public Health reported two cases this year. There were three in 2005.

Three have been confirmed in 2006 at both the Macomb and Oakland County health departments, where five each were reported the previous year.

The MMR has an estimated 90 percent success rate, said Dr. Talat Danish, medical director at the Wayne County Department of Public Health.

Officials have attributed some of the Midwestern cases to exposure among college students and young adults.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2006

States think big on health reform

By Daniel C. Vock, Stateline.org Staff Writer

Massachusetts has accomplished the improbable: It got Democrats and Republicans to agree on how to provide nearly every resident with health insurance. And it did so without boosting taxes or pushing aside private health plans.

Spearheaded by outgoing Gov. Mitt Romney (R), the compromise marks a marriage of competing visions for health care reform shaping state policies around the nation. Democrats stress the need to move toward health coverage for all. Republicans promote putting consumers in control. What Massachusetts did was to fuse these philosophies.

While Massachusetts is hailed as a trailblazer, even states with less ambitious goals are setting out to repair the country's broken health care system. The changes go beyond taxpayer-funded Medicaid programs for the poor and disabled. States are expanding medical coverage for the working uninsured, rewarding patients who develop healthy habits and prodding private industry to offer greater health benefits.

States feel the brunt of spiraling medical costs in their bottom line. Plus, there's powerful political pressure for states to address the problem of the uninsured. The Census Bureau found that nearly 47 million Americans – one in six – went without health insurance in 2005. When it began keeping track in 1987, 31 million Americans – fewer than one in eight – lacked coverage.

Massachusetts' new policy aims to cover 460,000 uninsured residents by July. Some 106,000 are already eligible for Medicaid care but weren't enrolled. Another 150,000 will get help buying a private health insurance policy, subsidized by a portion of the \$1 billion the state now uses to reimburse hospitals for charity care.

The remaining 204,000 must buy private insurance through their employers or through a new state agency. That group includes many uninsured workers who consider private coverage too expensive or who are young, healthy and willing to risk going without. They will face tax penalties if they don't buy a policy: loss of their personal exemption, and by 2008, a penalty equal to half of what health insurance premiums would have cost. Employers who don't provide health insurance will face annual penalties, too – \$295 per worker.

A new state agency – the Commonwealth Care Health Insurance Connector – will create a market for private insurers to compete for the new customers and offer benefits otherwise tough to find. For example, a seasonal worker could keep the same plan all year, even if he's working for two different employers, building houses in summer and plowing roads in winter.

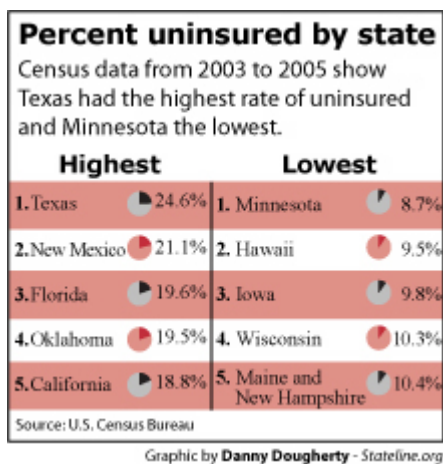
Workers using the Connector can pay for coverage with pretax dollars, giving them the same tax benefits as workers with employer-provided insurance.

"I think one of the things that came out of Massachusetts, which is in the air in many state

capitols and hopefully here in Washington (D.C.), is the incredible sense of compromise that they were able to pull off,” said Alice Burton, director of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s State Coverage Initiatives.

At a signing ceremony in Boston’s historic Faneuil Hall last April, Romney called the result a once-in-a-generation feat achieved “without a government takeover and without raising taxes.” The former businessman, who is mulling a White House bid in 2008, hopes the Bay State’s health care plan will be a signature issue.

Of course, it could fall apart when Massachusetts residents who are voluntarily uninsured are forced to buy coverage or face tax penalties. It would not be the first health-care reform attempt to backfire. In 1988, Michael Dukakis, then governor of Massachusetts and a Democratic candidate for president, signed a “play or pay” law that required companies with six or more workers to offer health insurance or pay a \$1,680 tax for every worker. But after he lost, lawmakers in Boston repealed the mandate before it took effect.



The task of covering the uninsured is easier in Massachusetts than in most other states. Its 10.7 percent uninsured rate already is one of the lowest in the country.

But other states are trying to close the gap, too. Soon after Massachusetts adopted its plan, Vermont’s Republican Gov. Jim Douglas and the Democratic majority in the Legislature took similar action.

The Vermont approach shares many elements with Massachusetts’ reforms: premium assistance for the working uninsured, enhanced Medicaid benefits and an opportunity for all residents to buy insurance through the state, at premiums ranging from \$60 to \$135 a month. It

also penalizes businesses that don’t offer health insurance.

Vermont hopes to cut costs by encouraging diabetics and heart patients to keep up with treatment. And it wants to allow HMOs to give discounts to policyholders who quit smoking or take steps to address chronic conditions. Maine’s Democratic Gov. John Baldacci is rethinking how to pay for a year-old program designed to move his state toward universal coverage.

When the Dirigo Health initiative was launched in 2005, Baldacci argued that savings from driving down health costs could be used to insure more residents. But health insurers say he overestimated the savings. They sued when the state tried to collect \$44 million it claims to have wrung out of the health care system. The court challenge failed, but newly re-elected Baldacci has agreed to take another look at how to fund the program.

Expanding health care coverage is a big issue in many state capitols:

- After narrowly winning re-election, Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) challenged the Democratic Legislature to extend health benefits to more than 70,000 uninsured children. He also signaled he was open to a Massachusetts-style mandate that all residents be insured.
- California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) promised to make access to health care a major focus of his second term after vetoing a move by the Democratic-controlled Legislature last year to jettison private health insurance and switch to a government-run health system for all. “Socialized medicine is not the solution to our state’s health care problems,” Schwarzenegger wrote in his veto message. Labor unions that supported the state takeover, including the Service Employees International Union and the California Nurses Association, have vowed to bring the issue before voters in a 2008 ballot initiative if Schwarzenegger fails to act.
- Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) rolled out his AllKids initiative, which lets parents buy coverage from the state for their children, even for illegal immigrant children who are ineligible for Medicaid. The price depends on the parents’ income. Blagojevich has stressed that AllKids allows parents of all incomes whose children have chronic diseases to buy coverage that might be unaffordable in the private market.
- Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Rendell (D) convinced his Legislature to adopt a comparable Cover All Kids initiative, and Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle (D) is backing a similar plan. Democratic Govs. Bill Richardson of New Mexico, Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas and Christine Gregoire of Washington state also called for universal coverage of children.
- Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) is seeking federal approval for her \$1 billion plan to use Medicaid funds to help Michigan’s uninsured buy private health coverage.

Despite these efforts, the number of uninsured children grew in 2006 for the first time since Congress launched the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) in 1997.

The program helps states cover uninsured children living in families who earn too much to qualify for traditional Medicaid. In 2005, more than 8 million children and teens under 18 were uninsured. But aggressive expansions of health care can have pitfalls.

Tennessee built up its Medicaid coverage greatly in 1994. But by 2005, Gov. Phil Bredesen (D) had to cut 170,000 enrollees from the TennCare program because of perennial budget overruns. Bredesen assailed the program as “too expensive, too rigid, too hard to control.”

TennCare had been a model for S-CHIP. It began as an experiment to help working families who could not afford private insurance. The idea was that, by aggressively managing their care, TennCare could cover far more people for the same dollars spent on Medicaid. But the program covered the sickest people, making them more expensive to insure.

The program encountered large overruns from the start and grew to consume a third of Tennessee’s budget.

After pushing through cuts in TennCare, Bredesen, a former health insurance executive,

championed his own Cover Tennessee initiative, designed to give working families access to basic medical services. The voluntary program emphasizes personal responsibility – people get a break on premiums if they stop smoking or lose weight.

The federal government gave a boost to healthy living initiatives in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. It allows states to increase benefits for Medicaid clients with healthy lifestyles, an emphasis meant to improve both patient's health and states' bottom lines. As a result:

- West Virginia now makes people in a Medicaid pilot program agree to follow such simple rules as showing up for doctor's appointments and getting their children immunized. If they comply, they qualify for extra benefits, such as mental health services and greater prescription drug coverage.
- Kentucky plans to offer expanded benefits for patients who faithfully follow disease-management programs. For example, someone who keeps up with treatment for asthma or obesity could earn credits toward dental and vision care.
- Idaho offers Medicaid recipients a medical savings account. Healthy behavior can earn them money to cover smoking-cessation or weight-loss classes, among other things.
- In a pilot project in two Florida counties, Medicaid beneficiaries with healthy habits can earn up to \$125 a year toward over-the-counter medicines and other medical supplies.

Florida, in addition, is at the forefront of a drive to make Medicaid programs work more like private health insurance.

It requires Medicaid patients in a two-county pilot program to pick an insurance package from among competing private plans. The state pays the premiums and eventually plans to pay private insurers more for costly patients, such as the elderly and disabled, than for healthier ones.

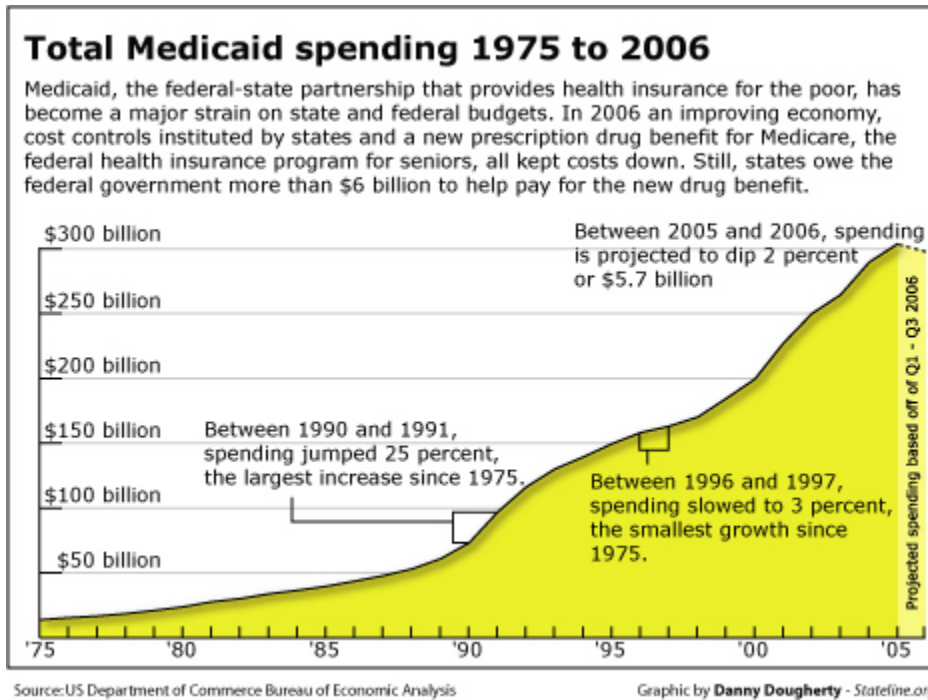
Three out of five Americans receive health insurance through their employer, but that number is slipping. States are trying both carrots and sticks to slow the trend.

Arizona, Kansas, Montana and West Virginia recently began offering tax credits to small businesses that offer insurance to their employees. Arkansas, New Mexico and Oklahoma offer small businesses and the uninsured the chance to buy discounted coverage through the state.

On the other hand, in a move aimed at Wal-Mart, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation last year to require large employers to contribute certain amounts toward employee health benefits. The Democratic-controlled Legislature overrode Republican Gov. Robert Ehrlich Jr.'s veto, but a federal judge invalidated the so-called "fair share" measure, which had been pushed by organized labor.

Hawaii, the only state with an employer mandate, has required most businesses to offer health benefits since 1974. Still, 9 percent of its residents are uninsured. In the past, Massachusetts,

Oregon and Washington state passed employer mandates only to rescind them before they took effect.



The preceding article was excerpted from *State of the States 2007*, *Stateline.org*'s annual report on significant state policy developments and trends. This 48-page publication will be available early next month. Our limited supply of print copies is already exhausted, but to order an electronic version, click [here](#).

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Contact Daniel C. Vock at dvock@stateline.org.

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December 27, 2006

Seniors go upscale

Living large

Posh retirement villages offer way to spend golden years in style

Joe Menard / The Detroit News

NOVI -- George Fulkerson has a lot of tough choices to make each day.

Will he take in a few games of billiards or curl up with a book beside the fireplace? Will he get a deep tissue massage or swim a few laps in the heated pool? Tai chi or yoga? Filet mignon or honey Dijon salmon?

This is retirement for the 80-year-old attorney, who less than four months ago moved into Fox Run in Novi, part of a growing number of communities offering a resort-like atmosphere for Metro Detroiters to live out their golden years.

"The amenities here are considerable. We like it very much," said Fulkerson, who moved into a two-bedroom, two-bath unit at Fox Run in August with his wife, Ruth, after selling their West Bloomfield home of nearly 50 years. "There's a certain resort aspect to the life here."

Seniors are living longer, more active lives, and companies are responding by offering luxury retirement communities as an alternative to nursing homes. The country club-modeled communities don't come cheap -- rents can reach \$2,000 to \$3,000 each month in Metro Detroit and some communities require deposits topping \$100,000 -- and are not Medicare-eligible like their nursing home counterparts. Yet the business is booming. While there is no overall count of units for Metro Detroit, two of the largest companies alone have built some 1,300 new units since 2000 despite an otherwise struggling economy and real estate market. More are in the planning stages throughout southeast Michigan.

The number of Americans who live in the estimated 36,000 retirement communities and assisted living centers nationwide has more than doubled since 1998 to about 1 million, according to an October 2004 MetLife survey. That number is expected to climb sharply once America's 78 million baby boomers -- some now hitting their 60s -- enter retirement.

"We are going through a growth period right now," said Paul Williams, director of public policy for the Assisted Living Federation of America, a trade group for retirement communities. "Assisted living is continuing to grow."

Combining levels of care

In Metro Detroit, developers have no plans to slow the expansion of retirement communities.

"Waltonwood is the fastest growing sector of the Singh development group," said Laura McLaughlin, operations manager for the company's retirement properties. Singh has doubled the number of its high-end Waltonwood retirement and assisted living centers in the past two years to six, with new properties in Canton Township, Rochester Hills and Novi. It will open a seventh in Sterling Heights next year and is planning two other communities.

Retirement communities are also incorporating many of the services offered by nursing homes, such as Alzheimer's care. Some are adding separate wings those who need greater assistance; by combining the levels of care in one facility, companies are able to retain residents rather than lose them to nursing facilities as their medical needs advance.

"That's probably become the hallmark of assisted living in the last few years," said Horace D'Angelo Jr., who is president of the Royal Oak-based Caretel Inns of America and sits on the board of directors for the Michigan Assisted Living Association. The group has 4,200 members statewide.

D'Angelo opened a new center in Brighton last year, his third in Michigan, and has another under construction in Linden near Flint and in Frankenlust Township in Bay County. All three will combine assisted living, memory and nursing care in different wings of the same facility.

"There is no question that we have more and more kinds of housing options opening up for seniors," said Elinor Ginzler, director for livable communities for AARP. "About 25 years ago, there weren't any assisted living facilities. If you needed assistance, you went to a nursing home."

Stiff competition raises bar

Assisted living facilities started to emerge in the 1980s, when hospitality companies such as Hyatt -- which launched the Classic Residence line in 1987 -- began to compete with nursing homes for senior citizens, Ginzler said.

Now movie theaters, cafes, salons, spas, gyms and five-star dining are expected of retirement communities seeking seniors with the resources to pay for them.

"The trend is a tremendous amount of selection of amenity services," said Williams of Assisted Living Federation of America. "It's just amazing the different type of amenities you see finding their way to assisted living. They're the equivalent of what you would expect at a resort."

The resort quality shows in the menu at Fox Run, which uses fresh ingredients delivered semiweekly for its daily beef, chicken and fish entrees.

"You can't take shortcuts with them," said Dining Director Kevin Cunningham, who came to Fox Run after stints as food and beverage manager at Hyatt Regency in Dearborn and food and beverages director for Tournament Players Club of Michigan. "Their palates are very trained."

Cunningham is joined in the kitchen by chef Terry Shuster, who was executive chef at Fox and Hounds Restaurant in Bloomfield for 16 years.

"A lot of people say this is just like a cruise line," Cunningham said. "We're changing the way people will be looking at assisted living. It's important. This is everyone's future. We're all going to be going into our senior years and it's important to have that option."

It was an option that seemed to make sense for Clara Murphy, who moved into Fox Run three years ago after her grandson went to college. He had been living with her since her husband died in 2000.

"It's got everything you want. You don't have to come out of here unless you want fresh air," said Murphy, 80, who sold her Brighton home to pay the entrance deposit that topped \$100,000. "At first I thought it was a little too rich for my blood."

Murphy said her 50-year-old son offered to build her a coach house at his home, but she preferred to spend her retirement having fun with other retirees.

"Any excuse for a party, we have it," she said.

You can reach Joe Menard at (248) 647-7429 or jmenard@detnews.com.

Assisted living

Assisted living is a generic term describing a variety of different housing options, including independent, nursing and memory care. About 1 million Americans live in assisted living facilities, and a typical resident is an 83-year-old woman.

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December 27, 2006

Rochester

Judge to settle age limit dispute at senior center

Decision expected in weeks on whether people in their 50s can use area facility without having to pay extra fees.

Catherine Jun / The Detroit News

ROCHESTER -- An Oakland County Circuit Court judge will finally settle a years-long squabble on whether people in their 50s should be able to use the area senior center.

In October, Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris ordered the three communities that fund the Older Persons' Commission -- Rochester, Rochester Hills and Oakland Township -- to sit down with the center's governing board to hash out their differences over whether to levy fees for members under 60 and restrict their facility use.

The parties met twice but broke without agreement.

Last week, they returned to the courtroom, where Langford Morris said she would render a decision within a couple of weeks.

"It's really a sad thing," said Marye Miller, executive director of the senior center on Letica Drive. "Looking at it, you wonder what it's going to do to other senior centers ... where is this all going?"

As baby boomers continue to march toward retirement, the minimum age at tax-funded senior centers has become an issue.

Rochester officials have tried to prevent people under 60 from using the health and wellness programs at the 92,000-square-foot center since its opening in 2003, saying that an intergovernmental agreement stipulated a minimum age of 60.

After failing to get Attorney General Mike Cox to adjudicate the matter, they took the issue to court.

Mayor Stuart Bikson could not be reached for comment.

Miller said 50-somethings make up at least 200 of the center's 7,000 patrons and bring in tens of thousands of dollars annually. If additional fees drive them away, she will recommend that the board eliminate evening and weekend classes to cut costs.

"Looking at it financially, that would be the most practical thing to do."

Rochester Hills Mayor Bryan K. Barnett said the facility is not crowded, and that those in their 50s should continue to feel welcome.

"We hope the judge will agree."

You can reach Catherine Jun at (248) 647-7429 or cjun@detnews.com.

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Seniors' drug plans to change

Most participants to face higher costs

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT

FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER

December 24, 2006

Millions of senior citizens are likely to be shocked next week when they discover their Medicare prescription drug benefits have changed, often drastically, in particular bringing higher co-pays for brand-name drugs.

They have only this week to do something about it.

By Jan. 1, significant changes will be made in the second year of Medicare's Plan D prescription drug program. Though people already signed up do not have to reenroll, failure to check for changes in their plans could prove costly. Seniors may face hundreds of dollars in extra costs, for example, if they don't switch to cheaper generic drugs.

If people want to change plans or if they did not sign up for one last year, they must act by Friday. Otherwise, most won't be able to change or enroll until November.

Unlike last year, when senior citizens flooded agencies with questions about Part D, phones are quiet and appointment calendars largely empty for counselors ready to help with the changes.

Medicare Part D is a nationwide plan involving hundreds of private insurance programs that help pay for prescription drug costs. It was the biggest change made in the 51-year-old federal insurance program.

"It's eerily quiet. The fear is that come Jan. 1, all hell will break loose," said Patricia Flemings, a Medicare prescription drug counselor with the Detroit Area Agency on Aging, a nonprofit organization with offices next to Detroit's Eastern Market neighborhood.

The agency is one of hundreds nationwide that trained volunteers as well as staffers to field questions, only to see disappointingly few seniors use the free services.

Counselors remain available this week to help, by appointment, walk-in or phone.

Mary Ellen Ballenger of Detroit got help sorting through 54 Michigan Medicare drug plans.

A former manager for the defunct Park Davis drug company, she understands the pharmaceutical industry much more than most people and wasn't intimidated by the language and choices.

Still, she did not sign up last year for a Part D plan, thinking her late husband's insurance would pay for the drugs she takes for diabetes and other problems. After paying several thousand dollars for her medicines, including a heart drug that cost \$198 a month, Ballenger recently signed up for Blue Cross and Blue Shield's Prescription Medicare Plus Blue Plan B. She had to choose between getting her drugs at a local pharmacy or through mail-order

Where to get help

- The **Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program** provides free education and assistance for people with Medicare and Medicaid, their families and caregivers. Call 1-800-803-7174 or go to www.mymmap.org.
- Most counties have **Area Agency on Aging** offices that have counselors ready to help you with Medicare prescription drug plan decisions. In Detroit, the office can be reached at 313-446-4444.

Other agencies can be reached through the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, www.n4a.org; 202-872-0888. • The National Alliance for Hispanic Health offers help for Spanish-speaking people, through its Web site or hotline, www.hispanichealth.org; 866-783-2645. • The **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid** has extensive help on its Web site, www.medicare.gov/cg. The site allows you a chance to compare coverage offered by 54 Michigan plans for every drug you take. You can save the information

companies, which typically save seniors several hundred to \$1,000 a year, but sometimes with less reliability. She picked the pharmacy option.

A mid-November survey of 718 seniors by the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit health organization, found that only 5% planned to switch Medicare prescription plans. Although many said they saved money with the plans, one in four found problems with them. For many, the choices are too bewildering, said Jesse Jackson, the civil rights leader whose Operation RainbowPUSH organization is helping seniors nationwide. He recently came to Detroit for a seminar offered by the Detroit Area Agency on Aging and acknowledged that even his 82-year-old mother didn't sign up for a plan this year. Her excuse: "I can't take any more confusion."

John Aldridge, 79, of Detroit, a retired electrician, decided to switch Medicare prescription plans for next year, from Humana Medicare to Cignature RX, after finding that he paid too much after he exhausted his initial benefits and ended up in a coverage gap.

Known as the doughnut hole, the coverage gap for most enrollees begins after they've used about \$2,250 worth of drugs and typically continues until they've used about \$5,000 worth. Then catastrophic drug coverage kicks in.

During that period, the cost for one of his wife's drugs went from \$30 to \$200 for a single monthly prescription.

The Detroit Area Agency on Aging helped with his decision to switch plans. "Once I walked through it with someone else, I understood it," he said. "We really appreciated the help they gave us."

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published December 25, 2006

Best present ever: Mason family with special needs gets much-needed space

By Hugh Leach
Lansing State Journal

Until this year, opening gifts on Christmas was a process of stops and starts for Francis and Arlene Wanger and their family.

With 11 children, nine of whom have special needs, presents competed with people for space in their 1,000-square-foot home in Mason.

"Our living room was so small we couldn't all get into it at the same time," Francis said. "If I wanted to come in, someone else had to leave."

This year, the family will celebrate more comfortably, thanks to an early Christmas gift from the Greater Lansing Home Builders Association and the Lansing community: a 1,600-square foot, six-bedroom house built at no cost to them.

Seven of their children - Richard, 47; David, 46; Mary Beth, 37; Travis, 28; Kayla, 28; Frances Kay, 25; and Hannah, 16 - still live at home. Their two biological children will also be with them today.

The Wangers moved in last week to the new house next to the Lyons Road home where they've lived for the past 27 years.



(Photo by BECKY SHINK/Lansing State Journal)

Plenty of room: Mary Beth Wanger works on a beading project Thursday while sitting on her family's new couch in their new home. The house is a gift to the large family, replacing their old home, which had only 1,000 square feet.

How to help

- The Greater Lansing Home Builders Association still is accepting donations for the Wanger home.
- For more information about the project or to contribute, call 323-3254 or visit the association's Web site, www.glhba.org/WangerHome.htm. Donations are tax-deductible.

Photo Gallery:

[Home for Christmas \(12/2006\)](#)

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"I never dreamed anyone would do something like this for us," Arlene said. "I'm not sure we deserve it. We've just done what we wanted to do."

The Home Builders Association disagrees.

"They are such a giving family, and they have been so humbled by this," said Cindy Kosloski, the association's chief operating officer who has come to know the family well during the past year.

"This isn't something they asked for," Kosloski said. "It's something we wanted to do for them.

"When we asked if they had any special requests, Francis just asked us to make sure the house had a doorbell. That's the kind of people they are. We're ecstatic to have been involved in this project."

More than a Band-Aid

Home Builders Association member Mark Voss, who attends Holt Christian Church with the Wangers, got things started when he asked other association members to help him make repairs on the Wangers' old house.

Francis, who is retired from the Michigan Secretary of State's office and has a prosthetic foot, asked Voss to help him winterize the house last November.

"I could see what he wanted to do was just a Band-Aid fix," Voss said.

Kosloski was with a group of about 25 people who went to the Wanger home to do the repairs.

"We all felt an immediate urge to do something more for these people," she said. "We realized they needed a new house. We took the idea to our board of directors and to our foundation, and they agreed."

Construction began in August. When word spread, others in the community became involved. The list of people and companies that have helped numbers more than 260, Kosloski said.

"We really learned how this community can take a worthwhile project like this and run with it," she said.

No barriers

The house was built with the family's needs in mind.

There are no barriers that impede use of wheelchairs.

Counters are set at levels everybody in the family can use comfortably.

An attached garage with a wheelchair ramp eliminates the problem of getting family members into and out of the car in rain and snow. And there are 2 1/2 bathrooms instead of just the one the whole family used to share.

A chairlift soon to be installed on the stairway means Arlene no longer will have to carry Hannah, whom she refers to as her baby, up and down stairs.

Seated on a new couch donated by Peerless Furniture in the spacious lower level of the new home, Arlene is still shaking her head.

"I didn't expect any furniture down here at all," she said. "I was still trying to figure out how to bring our old couch in."

Like Roy Rogers

Arlene grew up as a fan of cowboy movie stars Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, who adopted several children with special needs.

That inspired her to do the same.

"Before we got married, I made Francis promise me that we would have at least one special needs child," she said.

One by one, the children came to them.

Seven have cognitive impairments. Three have some form of cerebral palsy. Three have visual impairments. Two use wheelchairs. One is blind. One is deaf.

The kids were there for foster care. But Francis and Arlene discovered they couldn't bear to part with them, so they adopted them.

"We were sort of selfish," Arlene said. "We didn't want someone else to get all the benefits from our efforts.

"The best thing is when we were able to see the kids do things we were told they would never be able to do."

Kayla, for example, was never supposed to be able to walk. Now she even goes downhill skiing.

Travis was not supposed to live to be 2. He's now 28.

It has been work, Arlene admits. That includes at least three trips a week to doctors, more than 100 surgeries, feeding tubes, countless diaper changes, five loads of laundry a day and getting up at 4:30 a.m. to dispense medications.

But it was work the Wangers enjoyed.

"We did whatever we had to do," she said. "Now we have lots of stories we can all laugh at."

New house takes shape

Arlene said most of her children didn't fully understand what was in store for them, even though they have seen the new house going up just a few feet from their old home for the past four months.

David, 46, was skeptical at first.

"When we told them we were moving, David decided he would stay here one night," Arlene said.

"But when he saw his room decorated with cowboy stuff and his life-sized Matt Dillon standup, he decided he would stay."

Richard, 47, proudly displayed the Michigan State University flag he found hanging on the wall above his brand-new bed.

"I didn't know we were going to move in," he said late last week. "I'm still trying to learn everything about this house."

Arlene said contractor Mike Bofysil and interior designer Nancy Schram consulted with her to make sure everything was just right.

"All of the people who worked on this were very pleasant and excited to do this for us," she said.

"We can't thank them enough."



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Area children's need for warm clothes soars

Social workers see drastic increase; more end up on waiting list

Tuesday, December 26, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

News Staff Reporter

Mitchell Elementary School social worker Christina Montague is working with five homeless families this year. Usually, she has one or, at most, two.

"It's worse than it's ever been in my 32 years in Ann Arbor schools," said Montague, who refers families to the Warm the Children program sponsored by The Ann Arbor News. The program uses readers' donations to buy winter clothing for children.

At Lakeland Elementary in the Pinckney Community Schools, social worker Kathy Stegmaier said about double the number of children qualified for the program this year compared to last.

Most of the children's parents work, but don't earn enough to buy food, pay the rent and keep growing children in good clothes, the social workers said.

"Warm the Children is really helping some needy families this year, reaching down and helping some needy folks, and there are so many with the plants closing," Montague said.

Because volunteers help with everything from administrative tasks to shopping,

every dollar donated to the

program is a dollar to buy warm

clothing. And with reader donations of \$117,718 so far this year, the program has provided clothing for more children this year - nearly 2,100 - than ever before in its 10-year history. Previously, the largest number helped in a year was 1,600.

Yet there also are more

children waiting. About 150 children were put on a waiting list in 2005; this year, about 275 children will have to wait until next year.

Stegmaier said the Warm the Children clothes are special

because they are new.

"Our kids don't get new, they get used clothing," she said. "This is a chance for kids to get new clothes, and that's pretty special."

And Montague said it shows. Now that some of the Warm the Children clothes are showing up on the children in the schools, she said, "we've been getting some real happy faces."

"They wear it like a badge of honor: Warm the Children. They know that name," Montague said. "They might have new pants, a new sweatshirt. They wear it with pride."

But it's not just about taking, Stegmaier said. It's also about giving.

Stegmaier said one of her Warm the Children mothers, to teach her children about the

importance of giving back, signed the family up to work at an area soup kitchen. They did it the day before the

mother got the call from Warm the

Children.

"She is teaching her kids that no matter how needy you are, there are ways to give back," Stegmaier said. "These aren't people looking for a handout. They're truly in need, and want to return the favor when they can."

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

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Victim 'had a smile that wouldn't quit'

Wednesday, December 27, 2006

By Steven Hepker

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His obituary filed by Wetherby Funeral Home calls James Ketchens "a family hero" for actions Saturday night that might have saved the women and children in his house.

"He was doing the best he could to protect his family," the Rev. Sandy Spahr said.

She will conduct a memorial service Saturday at Trinity United Methodist Church.

Spahr, pastor of the Greenwood Avenue church for just six months, said the killing of Ketchens at the hands of his former brother-in-law, Anthony Dixon, has shaken the church.

"He had a smile that wouldn't quit," she said. "He always held out his hand and said, 'Good morning, Pastor. How are you?'"

Dixon shot and killed George Turner III, 33, who lived primarily in Arkansas but had a Jackson address. He later turned the gun on himself in suicide, police said. Another man, 21-year-old Darin Strenzel of Streeter, Ill., was shot in the leg.

Ketchens, 40, was hosting a holiday gathering Saturday evening at the Blackman Township home he shared with Joy Hatchett and their three children in the Stonegate Farms development.

Among the guests in the home were Ketchens' sister, Roslyn Dixon; her boyfriend, Turner; Joy's brother, David Strenzel; and his 21-year-old son, Darin Strenzel.

About 8:30 p.m., Roslyn Dixon's ex-husband, Anthony Dixon, arrived -- uninvited and agitated. The Dixons, of Holt, divorced recently, and he was upset with her new relationship. Ketchens met him outside in an attempt to talk Dixon into leaving. There was a gun blast.

"Mr. Ketchens was shot in the chest," Michigan State Police Lt. James Shaw said. He died later at Foote Hospital.

Dixon, carrying a rifle and handgun, approached the house. The men inside blocked the door. Dixon fired a few rounds into the door, hitting Darin Strenzel twice in the left leg, potentially mortal wounds.

"His father scooped him up and carried him to his car and took him to Foote Hospital," said Shaw, commander of the Jackson state police post. "Dixon let him go."

Dixon, an assistant principal at Gardner Middle School in Lansing, barged into the house and apparently held the group of men, women and children at gunpoint. Police said Dixon let the women and children leave the house.

It is unclear whether that was before or after he shot Turner to death. Shaw said detectives are still investigating and will re-interview the survivors to piece together the sequence of events.

With the house surrounded by dozens of state, county and Blackman Township Police using bullhorns, Dixon killed himself about 10 p.m. Police entered hours later to find the two bodies.

Darin Strenzel, a college student, underwent six hours of surgery on his leg Tuesday at University of Michigan Hospital. The first hurdle was to save his life, and now doctors are working to save his leg, grandfather Eugene Strenzel said today.

All seven of his children, including Joy, had gathered for Christmas. The siblings planned to work on the home Ketchens and Hatchett bought recently in Summit Township and planned to move into in January.

They are now in shock over the killings.

"I lost my son-in-law and almost lost my grandson," Strenzel said. Hatchett and Ketchens had been together 20 years but were not married.

Turner's family is planning the funeral and burial in Arkansas, Shaw said.

Ketchens, a veteran of the U.S. Army, was a salesman for Extreme Dodge of Jackson. He is survived by Hatchett and her daughter, Crina Hatchett; their two daughters, Julia Ann and Natalie Kaye; children Jacinta and Nigel in Louisville, Ky.; father and stepmother, James and Wendy Ketchens; his mother, Roseana Ketchens; and four siblings, Tracey Johnson, Jennifer Weathers, Justin Ketchens and Roslyn Dixon.

Information about a fund for Ketchens' children is available at the funeral home.

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Published December 27, 2006

Gunman was father figure for students in Lansing

Slayings leave those who knew educator reeling

By Susan Vela
Lansing State Journal

Anthony Dixon rarely, if ever, lost his temper while teaching at El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz Academy, a Lansing charter school with an Afro-centric theme.

He never seemed unstable.

And to many youngsters, Dixon, 34, of Holt became a father figure.

He took them to dinner, escorted them to athletic events and convinced the most irreverent that respect for authority and diligent schoolwork would get them where they wanted to go.

That's why Dixon's former students and colleagues still are reeling.

According to police, the assistant principal at Lansing's Gardner Middle School went to a Blackman Township residence Saturday and killed home-owner James Ketchens, 40; his ex-wife's boyfriend George Turner III, 33, of Jackson; and then himself.

His ex-wife, Roslyn Dixon, formerly Roslyn Ketchens, was at the home when the shootings began.

Anthony Dixon "had the most positive can-do attitude in terms of reaching black children who were extremely disadvantaged," said Sara Jackson, who tutored Dixon's Shabazz students in the 1990s. "He believed that was his purpose, (and) he changed people's lives."

Rocky relationship

Jackson said Shabazz was Dixon's first teaching job.

Over in minutes

BLACKMAN TWP. - Anthony Dixon, a popular Lansing educator, killed two men and then himself in a matter of minutes, Michigan State Police said Tuesday.

"This unfolded very quickly," Lt. Jim Shaw of the Jackson post said. "Within 10 to 15 minutes, it was over."

Dixon, Gardner Middle School's assistant principal, went to a Blackman Township residence Saturday to confront his ex-wife, Roslyn Dixon, and her boyfriend, George Turner III, 33, of Jackson. He fatally shot homeowner James Ketchens, 40, during a dispute on the lawn at about 8:30 p.m. and then went inside, where he killed Turner and critically wounded another male.

Dixon's ex-wife had escaped the Jacobson Drive home and troopers were on site when Dixon mortally wounded himself.

When the Michigan State Police Emergency Support Team failed at contacting Dixon for negotiations, members entered Ketchens' residence at about 2 a.m. to find the dead Turner and Dixon.

Relatives of Roslyn Dixon declined to comment Tuesday about the incident.

The lieutenant said he might be able to release the critically wounded shooting victim's name today, along with information about Dixon's gun. Troopers also are investigating the last 24 to 48 hours of Dixon's life.

"Hopefully, over the next few days, we'll be able to find some answers," Shaw said.

- From staff writer Susan Vela

Back then, he already was in a rocky relationship with his future wife, she said. He kept her picture, along with one of their daughter, on his desk.

Ketchens became Dixon's wife in 2000, about the same time Dixon left Shabazz for the Lansing School District, where he hoped to become a positive role model to more children.

The Dixons divorced this past fall, and, on Tuesday, a car in their driveway was packed with a suitcase, briefcase and garbage bags of clothing.

Jackson said she wouldn't be surprised if Dixon snapped after years of keeping silent about his problems.

"That just got the best of him," she said.

Her daughter - Christina Jackson, 21, of Okemos - saw Dixon last month while shopping at the Meijer store in Okemos.

"He seemed happy," Christina Jackson said.

"He gave me a hug, asked me how I was doing, told me that I looked good."

Remembered as caring

Last school year, Dixon was assistant principal at Lansing's Otto Middle School, where he was known for his kindness, understanding and caring ways.

Otto Athletic Director Keith Warriner said Dixon sometimes brought in ties for the basketball players, who were required to dress up on game days.

Dixon would remind them to keep their shirts tucked in and their ties on.

And, "the kids didn't want to let him down," Warriner said. "That impression he made upon young kids will last a lifetime."

Letters going out today

Lansing school officials met Tuesday. They plan to send out letters today, notifying Gardner and Otto families of the situation.

They're also planning to have crisis team members at both schools when classes resume Jan. 8.

Otto parent Charity Summers emphasized Dixon's downfall was due to personal problems; as an educator, he always did the right thing.

"He was very understanding," said Summers, who wants to take her children to Dixon's funeral.

"He made a mistake. He shouldn't have taken a life. But, to my children, he was always a wonderful man."

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December 27, 2006

Hairdressers curb domestic violence

300 Maine stylists and beauticians are trained to recognize signs of abuse and serve as resources.

Elizabeth Mehren / Los Angeles Times

BANGOR, Maine -- The new customer slipped into Janie B. Good's hair salon cautiously, as if worried that someone might see her. She was only in her 30s, but fear had etched tight lines in her face. With a nervous edge, she told Good: Don't cut off too much. He doesn't like my hair short.

It's your hair, Good started to tell the young woman whose tresses draped down over her shoulders. But as the client had leaned back for a shampoo, Good spotted bruises on her neck. Easing her fingers across the woman's scalp, Good felt bumps that could only have come from being struck.

"Honey," Good recalls saying, "we need to talk."

One reason Good, 59, became a hairdresser was that she figured it offered a window into human dynamics.

Now she is one of nearly 300 Maine stylists and beauty students trained to recognize signs of domestic abuse and to serve as resources for victims.

As part of a broad strategy to reduce the state's domestic violence rate, Maine public officials have identified hairdressers as new allies, using salons as a staging area.

These beauty professionals have been recruited not as enforcement agents, but as informed listeners who can suggest options to their clients -- if they are ready to hear them.

Each year, more than half the homicides in this sparsely populated state are traced to domestic abuse. Abuse victims often balk at going to the police because they fear authorities will not act, or that their abusers will hear that they were reported and seek retribution. Hairdressers are seen as safe confidantes.

Authorities say there is no way to quantify the results of this evolving approach. But in Maine, officials say, more and more women who call domestic violence hot lines begin by saying, "I heard about this from my hairdresser."

National statistics show that at least one in three women -- and a far smaller proportion of men -- will experience domestic abuse.

How it works

Maine's strategy is modeled on an effort in Alabama that won fast support from law enforcement specialists across the country.

Hairstylists place decals on their work station mirrors and hand out nail files printed with the number of a domestic violence hot line.

Along with photos of hair and makeup, they hang posters listing warning signs of domestic abuse.

Dozens of training sessions have taken place in Maine since the curriculum for salon professionals was unveiled in May.

Some of the state's 13 cosmetology schools are considering making these anti-domestic abuse seminars mandatory.

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Published December 24, 2006

Most won't feel impact of Prop 2 in near future

Public agencies reviewing ban on affirmative action

By Susan Vela
Lansing State Journal

Despite all the uproar over Proposal 2, the state's new affirmative action ban went into effect quietly Saturday.

And it's safe to say residents won't see a change in how public bodies operate for days, weeks ... even months.

Impact on state

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has issued an executive order for the Michigan Civil Rights Commission to investigate Proposal 2's impact. The investigation is supposed to include the review and identification of the following:

- Existing state laws and regulations relating to contracting, employment, diversity, and equal protection efforts.
- Proposal 2's impact upon state educational institutions and educational programs.
- Proposal 2's impact upon state economic development efforts and Michigan's ability to compete within the global economy.

Source: Office of the Governor

U.S. District Judge David Lawson of Detroit made a significant decision when he granted a delay last week to the state's largest research universities - University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University - for their current admissions and financial aid cycles.

In turn, state agencies and larger, diverse mid-Michigan cities such as Lansing and East Lansing say they're not launching any extensive changes until they know for sure which programs must be abandoned or altered.

They are conducting reviews to try to figure that out. They say any other strategies would be foolish.

"Proposal 2 required us to unweave this very tangled web," said Lansing City Attorney Brigham Smith, adding that Michigan's new constitutional amendment didn't provide enough time before implementation.

"To try to do it in 45 days is to steer (the city) right into the iceberg, I'm afraid."

In the November election, about 60 percent of Michigan's voters chose to eliminate race- and gender-based preferences in public education, employment and contracting.

Lansing city officials are exploring possible substitutes to race and gender, such as where a person resides, to assure diversity in city government.

And they're researching outreach and recruitment methods. Police Chief Mark Alley said he has concerns Prop 2 will threaten his department's recruiting efforts at historically black colleges.

"We're going to have the attorneys research if that's something we can continue to do," he said.

The city does have a request in federal court to hold off Prop 2's implementation, but a judge has yet to act on it.

So officials continue to assess the ban's impact.

For instance, Smith is overseeing a review of the city's programs, which are getting \$5 million in federal dollars to help communities.

Because federal law mandates affirmative action, "we need to do our homework to make sure we understand the implications of federal contracts," said Joan Jackson Johnson, the city's human relations and community services director.

In court

It's been said that lawyers will have a field day with Prop 2 litigation. Indeed, the governor, universities and civil rights and affirmative action groups already are tussling in federal court over Prop 2's constitutionality.

Rusty Hills of the Attorney General's Office said it's "hard to say" when the second spate of lawsuits over Prop 2's actual implementation will begin.

Attorney General Mike Cox worked with the universities on their concerns, but he has vowed to uphold the will of the people, as expressed by the election result.

Meanwhile, attorneys from the Miller Canfield law firm have traveled the state to advise the public sector about Prop 2. They recommended reviews wherever they went.

Lawyer Bree Popp Woodruff expects the institutions to take Prop 2 into account when conducting future job searches or contract bidding. "The next time they go to hire a person, they're going to think about this and how it affects their hiring process," she said.

Reviews

MSU is examining its programs while it deals with By Any Means Necessary, an affirmative action proponent that sued the governor and various university trustees because of Prop 2.

"We'll continue to review the admissions and financial aid part of it," spokesman Terry Denbow said. "As far as I've been able to ascertain, we're in compliance in other areas."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm issued an executive order asking the Michigan Civil Rights Commission to research how Prop 2 might affect state government. A report is likely in February.

"We're going very public with whatever the results will be," commission spokesman Harold Core said. "This was targeted toward government and public institutions. Any impact on private organizations should be negligible."

While East Lansing conducts its review and investigates ways to still enhance diversity, Mayor Sam Singh noted that Prop 2 could remain in court for some time.

"Proposals like this, that are so vaguely worded, often spend years in court before guidelines and regulations are put forward," he said.

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Column: Government busy propping up the economy

Wednesday, December 27, 2006

By Sharon Emery

Michigan residents flailing to stay afloat financially already know this, but as the state claws its way out of a six-year economic sinkhole, statistics are providing the answer to a question nobody is asking anymore:

How do people live when there aren't enough good-paying jobs?

They just do, somehow, each in his or her own individual, personally responsible way.

While government has generally been the safety net for the destitute, its role in supporting families is broadening to include the just-barely-making-it.

The new year will likely bring health care to more than a half-million uninsured via Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Michigan First Health Care Plan. With federal approval, it would cover working people making 200 percent of poverty -- less than \$40,000 for a family of four -- who would pay premiums based on a sliding scale, but no more than about 5 percent of their income.

Unless you have groceries delivered or shop at only the toniest of malls, you've undoubtedly rubbed elbows with these people. You may even know them. And, increasingly, you could be them.

The latest statistics from the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the annual Kids Count report are an eye-opener.

How do people live when the marketplace doesn't provide jobs that allow them to pay their bills? Government becomes the third leg of the stool. Big time.

One in every five Michigan kids -- twice as many as in 2000 -- get at least some of their meals from federal Food Stamps. That's more than 513,000 children 17 or younger. A mom with two kids is eligible if she makes less than about \$20,500.

About 33 percent of Michigan kids get health care from the government, which amounts to 893,000 children. That's up from some 20 percent in 2000. Children qualify for Medicaid when their family of three makes less than about \$24,000.

Government not only provides the structure that makes the economy work for people with inadequate jobs, it's also providing the kinds of jobs we can only hope other Michigan employers might provide.

The Department of Corrections recently announced that it would be hiring some 700 corrections officers across the state, paying them \$14 an hour.

DOC officials expected 500 to turn out for more information at a recent Muskegon Heights jobs fair. Among them was 48-year-old Crescenda Smith, who told the Muskegon Chronicle that she was there for one simple reason:

"I'm tired of not having a good job," Smith said. She's been working for a temp-services agency since losing her teacher's assistant job two years ago.

Another woman, anxious to find a full-time job with benefits, called the DOC hiring "a great job opportunity." Too bad there are only 700 slots when Michigan has some 350,000 unemployed people.

Ironically, the increase in the use of government social programs comes just as the governor and lawmakers finally found a way to shake off one of the last vestiges of the "welfare state." They've approved a 48-month limit on cash assistance for healthy adults.

But this economy thing is just not keeping with the program.

The Department of Human Services is more than \$30 million short this year, in part because more people are applying for welfare through the Family Independence Program. Lawmakers and budget geeks sat down in May and estimated that the state would have an average annual welfare caseload of 78,450.

But it turned out to be 80,360.

The good news is that after six months of increases, the caseload in November was 87,197, down from 88,133 in October. But obviously the numbers are still way over estimates.

Seems like government, if not the rest of us, is doomed to working overtime.

Contact Sharon Emery at (517) 487-8888 x236 or e-mail her at semery@boothnewspapers.com.

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Departments' overspending shows Granholm isn't minding the store

The Oakland Press

Web-posted Dec 26, 2006

EDITORIAL

How do you make \$70 million disappear and never notice until it's too late? Give it to the state government under Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Three state departments - Human Services, the Department of Corrections and the Michigan State Police - spent a combined \$70 million more than they were budgeted to spend in the state's last fiscal year.

The overspending is the largest since 1991, according to the nonpartisan Senate Fiscal Agency.

Granholm's budget director did not notify the Legislature of the overspending until it was about to adjourn for the year. Granholm's bureaucracy was forced to ask the Legislature for a supplemental appropriation to pay the bills racked up by administrators, who apparently either don't know how to budget or don't care what their budgets dictate.

Since state revenues are down, Lansing has even less money to throw at the overspending. Officials are preparing for the potential of cuts in services in the fiscal year that just began in October.

For the last four years, and particularly during her re-election campaign, Granholm made much of her allegation that she inherited a state budget that was in shambles and in the red from her predecessor. She pounded home incessantly her claim that Gov. John Engler cut programs mercilessly but still drove the state into a deficit of epic proportions. She was handcuffed, she said, by having to clean up Engler's mess during the first four years of her watch.

What did she learn from Engler's supposed botched administration? Not much, apparently.

With that much red ink and cutting that Granholm purportedly addressed, one would think she would have implemented plenty of stops and checks to prevent overspending. One would have to guess again, given the fact that her administrators in the three departments blew past their budgets by \$70 million.

The administrators of these departments work for the people of Michigan, but they answer to Granholm, the state's CEO. How will the governor deal with the failure of these administrators to appropriately handle the shareholders' investments? If history is any judge, they won't face any punishment.

The administrators of the Child Protective Services faced no action in the murder of Ricky Holland. No state employee higher than street services level was reprimanded or fired in the Patrick Selepak case, which resulted in the murders of three people.

In any publicly held organization, the CEO would ax the department directors who fouled up, at least for the sake of show and to restore confidence among the shareholders.

The \$70 million overage doesn't quite stack up to the budget woes Granholm claims Engler left her, but they're a good start.

When it comes to taxpayers' money, to paraphrase Union Rear Adm. David G. Farragut, it's damn the budget, full spend ahead with the Lansing bureaucracy. The bottomless taxpayers' purse always seems to refill the well. That's the nice thing when you're spending other people's money - politicians always seem to be able to find more of it.

The Legislature should demand regular reports on the budget status of all departments throughout the year, perhaps quarterly.

When departments begin to approach their financial limits, directors must be ordered to find ways to live within their budgets, not come begging for more when it's too late.



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Published December 24, 2006

Ritchie: To improve its future, state can't settle for just any jobs

Bryan K. Ritchie is an associate professor of international relations at Michigan State University.

A few months ago, I suggested that saving - and even creating new - jobs in Michigan might not be in our best interest if they did not promote our transformation into a third-stage, upgrading economy. I'd like to push this assertion even further by arguing that, to survive - yes survive - we need to become a community of innovators.

How do we do this?

It may be helpful to apply insights from the theory of evolution to the question. In a very simple form, organisms that adapt to new circumstances survive. Those that don't, don't. But some biologists suggest that, in fact evolution is not a linear process.

Instead, critical events lead to "punctuated equilibria" in which massive changes create entire new paradigms. Organisms that survive must change rapidly to survive. Then a period of stasis follows in which change happens primarily at the margins - until the next critical event.

Economics might also work this way. Relatively long periods of stasis between one kind of economy giving way to another relatively rapidly. Interestingly, the period of stasis between critical events and the time it takes to move to a new paradigm have both shortened dramatically, putting increased pressure on firms, individuals, states and countries to change ever more quickly.

We in Michigan are now facing just such a transformation. For almost a century, we've benefited from a vertical agglomeration in a few industries, especially autos and agriculture. Then, over a few short decades, the international economy changed.

Oh, we knew changes were happening, but we didn't really appreciate what they meant to us. Changes in consumer tastes, market access, technological capabilities, and foreign competitive capacity, among other things, have critically altered our system of wealth creation.

So, what do we do next?

The answer is to strategically abandon our old economy and create a new one. Note the word strategic. We need to take our old, vertically integrated model of manufacturing and turn it into a new, horizontal model of innovation and capacity that can be applied to numerous industries and at numerous points in the production process.

In this new economy, value and wealth are created in the design and research phase. Agglomerations and linkages are based on talents, skills, knowledge, and capacity, most of it scientific. Centers of innovation emerge that produce knowledge applicable to numerous industries simultaneously. Industries are then linked horizontally: new generation automobile engines lead to alternative energy, which leads to advanced agriculture, which leads to pharmaceuticals, which leads to medical technologies, etc.

The same change can also be applied to humans. Global changes demand that unions remake themselves to be pertinent in this new economy. For example, in Singapore organized labor leads in training and skills development, recognizing that increased pay must be tied to productivity gains, not collective bargaining.

These changes undertaken in response to a shifting global economy will attract similar capacities, skills, knowledge, and capital. We must again become a capital, but one that produces ideas rather than cars

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Published December 24, 2006

It's time: As budget crisis resumes, governor must take political risks

A Lansing State Journal editorial

The politics of taxation are well known in Michigan: "taxes = bad, always."

Nevertheless, Gov. Jennifer Granholm's pronouncements last week about a renewed crisis in Michigan's budget were disappointing.

A refusal to discuss specific major tax plans. A pledge to "wring out inefficiencies" in state government." Did someone mistakenly hand Granholm one of Dick DeVos' campaign scripts?

Tough times are decision times

Before Granholm's admission that the state's looking at another \$1 billion budget hole, this board had discussed using this space today to call on the governor to be bold in 2007; to convert her election triumph into significant reforms to benefit Michigan.

Now, she doesn't have a choice. With a big shortfall in K-12 funding, plus a general budget gap, plus the need to write a new state business tax before the existing one expires in about 370 days, Granholm doesn't have the luxury of sticking to the vague and assuring language of the campaign trail.

Back in the summer, the Republican Legislature and Granholm brokered a state budget that depended on expected improvement in state revenues.

This freed everyone to campaign and argue about what wasn't being done about the Single Business Tax.

Now that decision has come home to roost. Granholm admitted last week that revenues are running well behind expectations, especially for the School Aid Fund. It's \$300 million in the hole for this year. The state's down another \$200 million in this year's budget. And just to keep things status quo in next year's budget would require a new \$500 million, or the equivalent in cuts.

And Granholm's plan?

Talk about tidying up the state's spending house and a generic pledge to resist big cuts to key public services.

Of course, it's possible Granholm has bold plans in hand - which she'll release after the Jan. 18 revenue conference that will give firm numbers on the crisis. Or perhaps the "wow" stuff will come with her State of the State address a couple of weeks after.

Certainly, the people of Michigan will be expecting something for the resounding victory they handed Granholm. They rejected the economic ideas of DeVos - additional tax cuts and deep cuts in government spending.

Granholm, of course, didn't run for re-election on a specific financial platform. She wants Michigan to invest itself; how we get there is not fully clear.

There is her proposal to alter the SBT in a way that doesn't denude Michigan of even more money for services. That's good.

But holding the line alone won't resolve the crisis. And it sure as heck isn't bold.

Problem won't go away

Despite rhetoric from some quarters, Michigan has reduced spending; it had to. Since 2000, Michigan has taken \$2 billion out of its revenue base, the Citizens Research Council of Michigan reports.

These decisions, the CRC points out, helped create a "structural" or ongoing state deficit. We have made commitments we can't cover; Granholm's \$1 billion announcement is just the latest chapter in a continuing story.

Yet, judging by the 2006 election results (Granholm ascendant, Democratic control in the House), the voters aren't interested in a vastly smaller state government. In fact the state has to invest more in education and protecting its children.

So, if we're not tinkering our way out of this, that means big ideas.

One with some political potential is to combine a cut in the sales tax rate with an extension of the levy to services (the existing tax hits goods, not services).

Then there's our idea of leading a reform of the state income tax, ending the state's flat rate in favor of a tiered system like the federal one.

And what if is the potential in forcing consolidation and regionalization in schools and local governments?

Maybe those ideas won't fly with voters; there are plenty of other concepts. One thing is sure, though: Michigan and its governor aren't going to tip-toe up on a solution.

Be bold, governor. The people will follow if you lead.

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